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A Teaching,
or a Method of Preparing Oneself for Death, for Every Christian

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Every man, both the sick and the healthy alike, is to remember death—which is unavoidable, for no one who is born can escape it, being covered by the Lord's Decree for the original sin of our Forefathers, Adam and Eve. "Earth thou art, and unto earth shalt thou go," it cannot be avoided. "What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death?" The Psalmist declares this universally to us all. Nevertheless, since a sick man is commonly understood to be closer to death than a healthy one, he must therefore cast aside all anxieties regarding temporal matters as much as possible and strive to ensure he may die a good death. For upon this final moment of our life, all eternal happiness and eternal misery depend. Therefore, as soon as a sick man perceives himself to be in danger of losing his life, let him endeavor to remove from himself the excessive

visitations and conversations of friends and neighbors regarding worldly and especially vain matters, as well as the weeping, sighing, and lamentations of his household members. Let him clear for himself free time for pious thoughts and for listening to priestly counsel. Afterward, if he has not made a Will in time, let him make it without delay, so that later, upon his death, no confusion may arise among his successors due to a lack of order, and thereby not bringing a burden upon his soul. If he owes anything to anyone, let him satisfy it immediately before death; and if due to the shortness of time he cannot attain this, let him command his successors in his Will to make restitution from his estate. Furthermore, for the relief of his soul, let him distribute alms according to his means among the poor, or order them to be distributed, as well as for unbloody sacrifices and other Church matters for the salvation of his soul. Let him also from the bottom of his heart forgive all wrongs and offenses against him, from whomever he may have received them, following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who prayed to His Father for those crucifying Him on the Cross, saying: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Let him do this so that in the same manner he also may be forgiven, since our Savior Himself placed this indispensable condition for the forgiveness of sins in His Prayer, saying: "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." If, however, he himself has

offended anyone by word or deed, let him humbly ask for forgiveness with all his heart. If also—as often happens to many of the faint-hearted upon realizing the near approach of death—an excessive fear of it should consume the sick man, he may employ the following remedies against it:

First, let him reflect that God is the supreme Lord of Life and death; and therefore let him consider that he received this temporal life from Him, Who, not out of any obligation but out of His grace, granted it to him freely until now, and at any hour He pleases, as God, He may take it back. Let him then, like righteous Job, rely entirely upon His sole divine will, being grateful for His benefits, and resolve to think and say: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. As it pleased the Lord, so let it be." After this, he may reflect within himself that no one can know better at what time we ought to end our life than the eternal Divine wisdom; for it has, from the beginning of the world, predestined this present term of your life. You yourself cannot know when it would be better for you to die, for now, by the grace of God, it is granted to you to depart from this world with a good disposition of conscience, whereas later you might fall into grievous sins, and pass away without any mindfulness or repentance—and who knows if you might not die a sudden death. Therefore, thanking God for permitting such an orderly preparation for death, speak after Christ your

Savior those words which He spoke in the Garden to His Father: "My Father, not my will, but Thine be done," or after the Apostle: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain; whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

REMEDIES, or METHODS for maintaining proper patience during the severe pains of sickness.

If, however, such severe pains should occur in sickness that the patient can scarcely bear them—which often leads to murmuring against Divine providence, and sometimes even to despair—then in such sufferings he ought to behave as follows. Let him recall those sweet and saving words of Christ his Savior, calling him to His glory through the Cross: "Whosoever will come after me, let him follow me." Therefore, these harsh pains of his present sickness are the Cross which he must patiently bear, so that he may truly follow Christ. Let him consider within himself what the Apostle considered: "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" For how could a sick man expect to enter into another's glory without patiently enduring the Cross of his own sufferings? Indeed, I can acknowledge that the pains of a sick man can be so harsh and severe that they may penetrate the very bones. Yet, they are never as severe as the sufferings of Christ. Let him ponder and recall that bloody sweat of the Lord, with which, from the mere anticipation of the approaching bitter agony, His whole Body

was covered, as the Holy Gospel remembers: "And his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." If he suffers from a severe headache, let him look upon the Head of his Lord, wounded even to the brain by the violent pressing of the sharp Crown of Thorns. If he languishes under a painful affliction of the chest and sides, let him gaze upon the side of his Savior, cruelly pierced by the Spear. If, lastly, he cannot endure the harsh torment of his Hands and Feet, let him turn his eyes to the Hands and Feet of the Lord, cruelly nailed to the Cross with sharp iron nails. And thereupon, with an affection of great zeal, let him say in his heart: "The servant is not greater than his lord. If my Lord and Savior suffered so much for my sins, how much more should I, the most wretched of all, suffer for my iniquities? And for the love of my Lord, I ought to endure all these illnesses encompassing me." Let him then recall the harsh and intolerable sufferings of the Holy Martyrs, who, being free from sins, willingly and courageously out of pure fervent love for their Savior endured them. Let him consider that zealous desire of Saint Lawrence the Archdeacon to suffer for Christ, who, bound upon a gridiron and placed over glowing coals, offered up special thanks to God for such regard and visitation in his suffering, which he deemed a greater happiness than all others for the sake of Christ. Let him remember the Holy Protomartyr Stephen, who, dying amidst a hail of stones,

forgot all the pain inflicted by the rocks, focusing only on the divine love for which he courageously endured it. Mindful of His love, he begged for the forgiveness of those who were killing him, saying: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." And thereafter, let him humbly pray to his Lord that, lest he fall short of patience in his severe pains, He would deign to grant him fulfillment from His most holy Passion and from the sufferings of the Holy Martyrs who willingly suffered for Him. Thus armed and fortified against these powerful assaults of the spiritual enemy—namely, the fear of death and impatience in sickness, with which he is accustomed to agitate the hearts of the faint-hearted at death, so as to plunge them into a wretched despair of salvation and bring about eternal death—the sick man, now remaining freer and safer from these temptations, must awaken within himself zealous affections and acts of Faith, Hope, and Love toward God, one after another, continuously and incessantly. Since time will no longer suffice for him to serve God in other ways, he can make amends for his transgressions at the very decline of his life through these same three mentioned virtues, which are the highest above all others and most pleasing to God, and for this reason are recognized as Theological by the Church, they thereby satisfy Divine justice. This is what that blessed, prudent thief experienced in himself when, with faith in Christ the Savior, steadfast hope, and love, he cried out to Him:

"Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." And immediately he received the longed-for reply: "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." And since faith is the very foundation of our salvation, and without it, it is impossible to please God (as the Apostle warns us in Chapter 11 to the Hebrews), therefore the sick man should endeavor to reaffirm all the past acts of his faith—whenever he held them steadfastly and without doubt—and to bring forth fresh ones out of zeal, as many as he can manage at that time from the depth of his heart, believing with his heart and confessing with his mouth: That Almighty God created him out of nothing, in His likeness and image, and did this not out of any necessity, for before the creation of the world He could do, and did do, without Angels, men, and all creation; and just as He lacked nothing for His endless and incomprehensible happiness, so from their creation and existence nothing was added to it, but He did this solely out of His own goodness. According to which goodness He willed us to be partakers of eternal happiness and of His Beatitude. That He made him an heir to the Kingdom of Heaven. That when he was fallen through the deception of the devil and brought into hellish bondage because of original sin, He redeemed him by the most precious Blood of His Son through harsh torments suffered in the Most Holy Body taken from the Most Pure Virgin. That for one who falls into many mortal and countless common sins, and is

thereby liable to eternal condemnation, He left forgiveness in priestly hands. and preserved a proven medicine for all spiritual sicknesses in the treasury of the Church's saving SACRAMENTS. That according to the full measure of time decreed before the ages, until which this visible world is meant to stand, He shall come to judge the living and the dead, and shall repay everyone according to their merits, either with eternal glory or with endless punishment. Believing also everything whatsoever that the Lord has given us to believe through the Holy Apostles, Confessors, and Teachers of the Church, and testifying to this before Heaven and earth, that for this Faith he is ready even to shed his blood if need should arise. Thus, having laid the unshakable foundation of Faith, he must then build upon it such an unwavering hope that the Supreme Lord, Who does nothing in vain—for doing something fruitlessly without a proper subsequent effect is a sign of a lack of judgment, whereas Almighty God is the highest, infinite wisdom that can never err—has therefore created and governed by His unsearchable wisdom even those things which seem to us the smallest among the countless varieties of creation, such as the making and preserving of a single small fly or a single tiny worm. For this reason, the Royal Prophet, after long contemplation of the traces of His Wisdom, being unable to fully trace them out, cried out in great renowned wonder: "O Lord, how manifold are thy

works! in wisdom hast thou made them all." If, then, the creation and preservation of a single poor fly or a single tiny worm is not in vain to Him, but He alone knows for what purpose it fits, how much more concerning man's creation, preservation, and the rescue of the fallen who are redeemed through the saving Sacraments, should His Providence fail to save and make him a partaker of eternal glory? Therefore, the sick man, considering this, should nurture within himself an unwavering Hope. That Almighty God desires to save him specifically, and this is the unalterable will declared once through the Prophet Ezekiel by the Divine Word (and Heaven and earth shall pass away, but His words shall never pass away), where He speaks thus: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." And if the spiritual enemy should set before the sick man's eyes the weight and multitude of his committed sins, thereby leading him to despair of salvation (which is the enemy's custom), let him not listen to those temptations in the least. For there is no sin in the world so heavy that Almighty God could not forgive it to a man who sincerely repents of it. "There is no sin that overcomes the love of God for mankind," Holy Scripture assures us; furthermore, all sins, no matter how countless in number they have been committed, are nevertheless finite, while the Mercy of God is infinite. How could a finite thing overcome the infinite? We

also know well and believe that just as our Lord Jesus Christ laid down His soul for the sins of the whole world, so He forgives the sins of the whole world; and if He can forgive the sins of the entire world, why could He not forgive the sins of just one sick man? For otherwise, as Holy Scripture says, the Hand of the Lord would be shortened in his case alone. Let him then, repenting of his committed sins, place his entire hope of their forgiveness solely in the particular merits of the bitter Passion of the Lord (for it is difficult to trust in one's own justifications, our righteousness being like a cast-off cloth before the Lord, according to the words of the Prophet Jeremiah). And considering this, all his transgressions will be forgiven him, having in this the infallible assurance of the Lord's Bosom Disciple and beloved Follower, in his General Epistle, in Chapter 2, expressed in these words: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Thus, the sick man, having confirmed within himself an unwavering Hope in the forgiveness of sins through the merits of the Passion of his Redeemer, must next turn with his whole heart, with all his soul, and with all his mind to the mercy of God, thanking Him sincerely both for His unspeakable and countless benefits which he never deserved, and for the fact that, through the singular goodness of His heart, He forgives

us the eternal punishments we deserved, for which cause He did not withhold His Only-Begotten Son but delivered Him unto death for our forgiveness. And furthermore, let him demand of himself a resolution filled with such an affection of zealous love: that if the Supreme Lord should still deign to keep him in this temporal life, he would rather choose to suffer a shameful death a thousand times over than to offend Him from that moment onward by even the smallest sin. From such a zealous love toward God, a zealous sorrow for committed sins is also accustomed to be born in human hearts, when they reflect with deep consideration that they have offended so unspeakably good a Lord for the sake of vain worldly delusions, passing lusts of the flesh and the eyes, and empty worldly praise—Him Whom, rather, for such great benefits, they ought to have loved above everything that can possibly exist, as the most desired and most beloved, even above their very soul. And such a sorrow is called true contrition of heart, to sorrow for sins: not out of fear of hellish torments, nor because of losing heavenly delights, but for this reason alone, that a man has offended Almighty God, his so exceedingly good Lord. Yet we cannot judge within ourselves the measure of such sorrow that would be accepted by God as true and sufficient contrition; only He Himself knows and discerns this, whose eyes see even our uncommitted deeds. For this reason, the safest thing to do is to submit this sorrow for one's sins

through Holy Confession under the power of forgiving sins left in priestly hands by our Savior, and assured by His Divine Word, which says: "Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Let the sick man then, as much as he is able, recall to his memory the sins he has committed since reaching the age of reason, noting them down as diligently as possible with their circumstances of time, place, and persons, which aggravate these very sins. Bringing them before the priest, let him open up as fully as possible and most humbly beg for their forgiveness. Establishing this in his thoughts through steadfast faith, let him realize that his Savior is invisibly standing beside the priest, listening to the Confession, accepting the sorrow for sins, and along with the priest, absolving him of them. And so, having cleansed his soul through confession, let the sick man then by all means strive to receive the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, for the sake of that so great and perilous journey into eternity upon which he is about to embark—a journey beset on all sides by the robbers of the air, of whom the Apostle reminds us in Ephesians, Chapter 6: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness in high places." And this is because when we have received the Supreme Lord in the Most Holy Sacrament and He present within our soul, he can no longer fear those robbers, but on the contrary, can safely say with the Psalmist: "I will fear no evil, for thou art

with me," and "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me," and "The Lord is my helper, and I shall look down upon my enemies." For this very reason, even the holiest of people refused to embark on the journey into eternity without this saving Sacrament of the Eucharist. Thus Saint Chrysostom departed for the next world having received this Sacrament from the hands of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul; Saint Mary Magdalene from the hands of Saint Maximinus, the Bishop of Aix; and even the Most Holy Virgin herself received it from the hands of her Son and our Savior before departing this life. Furthermore, let him receive the Last Anointing ordained by the Holy Apostles, so that—if it should please the Lord God—the sick man may either be restored to his former health upon receiving it, or, if it should be necessary for him to die, his daily sins may be forgiven him. Therefore, let the sick man endeavor to receive this holy Sacrament as well, for both of the reasons mentioned.

And thus, thoroughly fortified by the saving Sacraments, let him safely prepare for that journey into eternity in the Name of God. Dying with the disposition delivered in this short Teaching, every Christian will infallibly inherit eternal life.

AMEN.